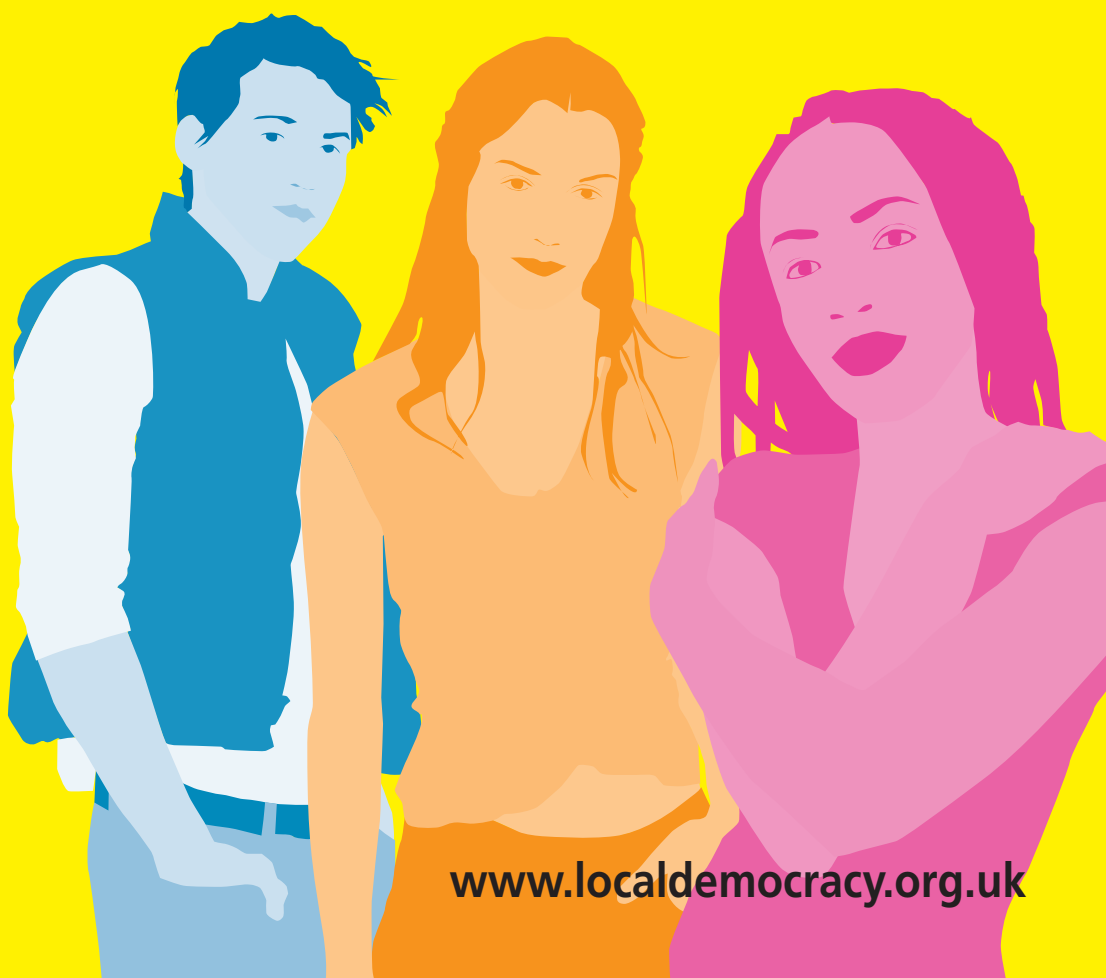


Local Democracy Campaign guide to...

introducing young people to local politics

The Local Democracy Campaign is about getting young people more involved with, and more aware of, their local council.



www.localdemocracy.org.uk

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What's it all about?

The Local Democracy Campaign is about getting young people more involved with, and aware of, their local council.

At the moment, most young people do not view local politics as a dominant force in their daily lives. Worryingly, just a quarter of 11-16 year-olds believe that their local councillor is the best person to approach in order to change something in their community. And when asked who they respect most outside their family, only one per cent chose politicians. The same number chose their dog!

So how can we change this? A good starting point is to bring politicians and young people closer together, and in ways that would encourage debate and reciprocal respect.

Research for the Local Government Association by Ipsos MORI shows that just one in three 11-16 year-olds have ever met a councillor or MP, and states that those who have 'are more likely to express feelings of political engagement and interest.'

There's a lot of good work going on up and down the country to connect young people with their local council and this work is proven to deliver results. While much of this work, however,

regrettably focuses solely on schools, this particular 'How to' guide attempts to bring together some of the ideas and activities that can be used in a youth club or in an environment where young people feel comfortable and relaxed.

It pulls these ideas together in one place and hopefully provides a simple starting point to get councillors and young people, re-engaged.

For support in reaching young people in your area, contact the LGA on 020 7664 3131 or visit the website at www.localdemocracy.org.uk

We are also on the lookout for any new and innovative ideas, especially in ways of bringing young people and councillors together, so please contact us if you have something new planned.

Email: localdemocracy@lga.gov.uk



First things first

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Councils and councillors make decisions that directly and indirectly affect young people. But do they really have a clue about the reality of young people's lives today? Attempting to rectify this problem is one of the aims of the Local Democracy Campaign, and you can help too. These activities are designed to give young people a better understanding of how local democracy works and what their role in the local community is. Through learning about how the local council operates and having an opportunity to meet local politicians, students can develop the skills they need to be active citizens.

So, the first thing to do... is start talking to each other!

Remember, the idea is to start a dialogue and develop a relationship with the local politicians (councillors). Both parties should be receptive to your approach and keen to hear of new ways to encourage engagement and to get out and about in the community, talking to young people. Your council will have received their own version of this guide so they will be aware of the Local Democracy Campaign and of many of the activities in this booklet.

Young people can of course contact the council or councillor themselves. Perhaps establishing such communication channels, however, is one of the objectives of the event you are planning so it is wise for the youth worker to broker the initial contact.

Contact initially via the council's democratic services, customer service or press office departments - the switchboard number will be easy to find - and enquire about the possibility of working with them to deliver some of these activities to young people. Find out what is being planned and discuss with organisers how they might work together on events and activities. If the council has a nominated local 'youth champion', use them!

Whoever you speak to will need to know:

- The name of the activity you would like the councillors to participate in
- The age group they will be talking to
- The number of young people involved in the session

Other things to think about include:

- What are the young people (and you) expecting out of it?
- Have the young people done something like this before?
- How many councillors/council staff you'd like to attend your event?
- Are there any topical issues in your area that would make a good theme?
- Remember that the councillor cannot show allegiance to any political party.

Political speed dating

What it involves...

- It follows the same format as traditional speed dating - a room full of two types of people who have a very short time to make an impression on each other
- Young people love it... they get to discuss the most important issues to them, and get a sense of the difficult and important decisions councillors make
- Councillors love it... it's a fun, quick and convenient way for them to meet young people on a one-to-one basis, and get a sense of their most important issues
- An easily downloadable pack is available that provides all the resources you need to run the session (see below).

How to do it...

- Participants - young people, aged 14 and above, and an equal number of councillors (up to 15 of each)
- The free 'political speed dating' pack (see below)
- An available venue for approx 90 minutes
- The venue (classroom/gym/assembly hall) set out with chairs facing each other around the room
- The DVD features a compere, 'Big D Mocracy', who introduces the game and leads everyone through each stage, and a set of score cards
- Everyone sits opposite each other, councillors on one side, young people on the other
- The young person can ask three questions in three strict minutes before the gong sounds
- Young people stay where they are; the councillors move on to the next young person
- Each councillor is graded and a winner evaluated.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the 'What's changed?' tool (see page 10)
- Use the event to begin building a relationship between the councillor and the young people, or at least with the club or project
- Try and get some local media coverage. Perhaps this is something you can do in advance, but in the very least, inform

them afterwards with some words and importantly pictures

- Political speed dating is part of the Solent People's Theatre's 'Local Democracy Day' package (see website for details: <http://www.solentpeoplestheatre.com>).

To request the free political speed dating pack:

Email: localdemocracy@lga.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7664 3131

Download: www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/resources

Invite your councillor to the club

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"Attending my local youth club has dispelled many myths and provides a fascinating insight to young people today"

What it involves...

- It's an interpretation of the popular and long-running campaign activity 'Take your councillor to school day' (see here: http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/resources/activities/how_to_guide_councillor_school/)
- Young people are visited in an environment in which they are comfortable
- Young people will have the opportunity to ask questions about the councillor's role as well as sharing their own opinions
- Each party shares day-to-day experiences
- Opportunity to demonstrate to councillors the pressures faced by young people, and how busy and hectic a youth club can be!

How to do it...

- Check the LDC website to see if a particular day of Local Democracy Week has been allocated as 'Take your councillor to...' - can you tie in with this?
- 'Take your councillor to...' is a flexible title! It could be a Mayor, or an MP or another elected representative. The important element is the location
- Agree days, dates and available times for both parties
- If the councillor is attending the club, then they should do so as any other attendee and should be encouraged to participate in any scheduled activities.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the 'What's changed?' tool (see page 10)
- Use the event to begin building a relationship between the councillor and the young people, or at least with the club or project
- Arrange a time or method for the councillor to give feedback

to the young people

- Encourage the arrangement of a reciprocal visit so the young people can see the councillor in action.

Note: The Hansard Society has produced a resource pack to prepare pupils for school visits by elected representatives. Entitled MPs in Schools, it is free and available on request from: citizenship@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Mock elections

"Bring the excitement of a real election to those not yet old enough to participate in the political process with the 'Y Vote' mock elections toolkit"

What it involves...

- All the high drama, intense decision-making and mass participation of a real election
- Provides the opportunity for young people to stand as party candidates, speech-writers and canvassers
- Young people recognise and follow a democratic process relevant to them
- It is an interactive and interesting active citizenship resource and actively engages pupils with political, social and moral issues.

How to do it...

- Get hold of the 'Y Vote' mock elections toolkit from the Hansard Society (see below)
- Some young people to take part - and enough time scheduled for canvassing, voting and announcing results
- Work with the young people over a period of time, helping facilitate the election process
- Tie in with a visit from a councillor to discuss their election experiences and encourage them to provide workshops for young people on canvassing/manifesto writing/lobbying and other electoral skills
- Produce voting slips, ballot boxes and replicate appropriate voting conditions
- Have a counting system prepared
- Announce and reward winning candidate.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the 'What's changed?' tool (see page 10)
- Use the event to begin building a relationship between the councillor and the young people, or at least with the club or project.

To request the Y Vote toolkit:

Email: hansard@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Tel: 020 7438 1222

Download: www.mockelections.co.uk

Attend a council meeting

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What it involves...

- Issue an invitation to young people to visit a council meeting
- Ask them to identify three things that they thought were good about the meeting and were positive examples of democracy
- Also identify three negative things that reflected badly on the council
- Ask the young people how they change and improve a council meeting.

How to do it...

- Contact the council (see page 2) and enquire about times, dates and accessibility to council meetings
- Approach the local councillor and let him know about your proposed visit. Use it as an introduction and invite them to be part of a fuller programme of activities
- Get the young people interested and put the date in their diaries
- Brief the young people on what to look for (see above). Perhaps produce a quick guide or glossary to show them what to expect
- Ensure there is a follow-up session arranged for further discussions and activities.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the 'What's changed?' tool (see page 10)
- Encourage the young people to write to the local councillor expressing their views
- Better yet, arrange a presentation by the young people, expressing their ideas to councillors, either at the council offices or on the young people's own turf (along with other activities as part of a councillor's visit - (see page 4)
- You could encourage councillors to try the same exercise - trying to imagine if they looked through young people's eyes, what they might be impressed with and what they might find off-putting
- Then compare the lists. Were there any surprises? What conclusions can be drawn?

They ought to do something about that

But who? Many of us, not just young people, only have the slightest notion of who might be responsible for decisions that directly affect them. They are inclined - especially when in doubt - just to blame 'the council'. But which council is it and which department?

What it involves...

- Have a debate with young people about council services and personal matters - ensuring it is framed as relevant to the young people to encourage participation from them
- Perhaps co-ordinate with a visit from the local councillor (see page 4)
- It can be tricky to get across the scope and powers and organisation of local councils without being dull. What you don't need is a dry civics lesson with charts showing council structures, committee responsibilities and incomprehensible job titles
- Making the topics relevant and interesting will help, but why not try a quiz-like approach, with teams, answering questions on real local issues?

How to do it...

- Prepare some cards with genuine concerns that have impacted, or realistically might, on local young people
- Most should be related to services provided by councils or which they contribute to. But include one or two others as well - to help young people distinguish them. For example: bus service; street lighting; parks; cinemas; housing benefit; police
- Organise into teams, create a scoring system and propose a prize!
- Take the cards, one at a time, and invite guesses as to whether it has anything to do with the local council or not
- And if it has, the following question is to identify which department they think is responsible for that issue.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the 'What's changed?' tool (see page 10)
- An extra activity is to help the young people produce an illustrated opinion sheet; photographing the heads and shoulders of the young people and drawing speech bubbles containing soundbite-type opinions on the local services and community
- Select a couple of the services and encourage further debate about the priorities young people would place on them
- If it seems appropriate, encourage the young people make to contact with councillors on the relevant committee and begin active dialogue and political action about a local issue
- Combine with other activities from the guide and website (www.localdemocracy.org.uk)
- This activity runs along similar lines to Pupil power, the Pokemon style card game for 7-11 year-olds, from the Local Democracy Campaign. For more details, please visit: http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/resources/activities/pupil_power/

For further details:

Email: localdemocracy@lga.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7664 3131

Download: www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/localdemocracy/resources

The quiz

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What it involves...

- A quiz where teams of councillors and young people face questions on each other's 'areas of expertise'
- Choosing a format that suits the people and the venue. It could be a 'pub quiz' type with written answers or you could adapt a familiar and favourite format from television quiz shows
- Can reveal the extent of knowledge that both parties have about each other's lives - or the lack of it!

How to do it...

- A venue, some time and two willing teams of councillors and young people
- Young people can compose their own questions for the councillor's team
- Encourage them to think about issues that matter to them but here are some suggestions:
 - What is the weekly rate for single person's Income Support or Jobseekers' Allowance?
 - What is the minimum wage for young people?
 - Which are the three most popular local venues for young people aged 13 to 19 to hang out in?
 - How much does it cost to get into the local cinema/swimming pool/bowling centre?
- Ideally the councillor will come equipped with their own questions, but in prior discussions, take advantage by suggesting some issues the young people might be interested in talking about:
 - How much do councillors get paid?
 - How much time do they spend on average on council duties each month?
 - What is the difference between a councillor and an officer of the council?
 - How do you become mayor or leader of the council?
 - What does the mayor's role involve?
- Play it as fun. You cannot draw too much in the way of conclusions from any result because you cannot create any kind of parity of questions.

What to do afterwards...

- Evaluate the event using the What's changed? tool (see page 10)
- Arrange a follow-up session with the same participants (or at least with the young people) to discuss the revelations
- Try and get some local media coverage. Perhaps this is something you can do in advance, but in the very least, inform them afterwards with some words and importantly, pictures.

What else?

Once the relationship with the local councillor (or council) has begun, keep in close contact with them to organise follow-up and future events. As well as the innovative ideas in this pack, many of which need not be used in isolation, there are many other ways to keep the councillor engaged with young people in the area.

Suggestions include:

- Why restrict friendly competition to quizzes? Any event that matches young people against councillors could lead to greater recognition, mutual understanding and media coverage. How about a sporting challenge to bring the two groups together?
 - Stage a drama performance or perhaps make a film for local people (including councillors) that highlights an important local issue
 - Get the young people to compile an audit report of the local facilities available and present it to the council
 - Run a competition to create a poster or series of posters with simple messages about the importance of voting or on local issues
 - Help young people to draw-up a local youth manifesto for the council to abide by
 - Encourage the councillor to run a weblog or online debate with some young people
 - Organise your own 'life swap' between councillors and young people (for further information, visit: www.norfolklifewap.org.uk/)
 - Persuade the council to use its influence and invite a local celebrity to endorse the importance of voting and appear in the local media with this message. This would obviously be more effective if the celebrity is known to the young people!
 - Ask your local newspaper for a regular column or face-to-face feature, where young people or youth groups can raise and debate local issues. Do the same with your local radio station
- And finally, demand the council nominates a local 'youth champion' (which means speaking up for young people and defending their interests and rights) and forge a relationship with the nominated councillor.

What to do afterwards?

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What's changed?

"If the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of change do not know that it is happening - then it probably is not happening"

Lord Herman Ousley

If you are holding an event with, or for the benefit of, young people then there are many things to consider - not least that they are being involved in and consulted on the planning of the event.

To evaluate the success of that event, in terms of the participation of young people, it must be measured by the changes that have resulted on specific issues and concerns raised by those children and young people.

What's changed is a tool for mapping the impact of participation activity - it seeks evidence of listening, planning and change resulting from children and young people's participation. It can be used to plan participation activity and supervision, as well as to record successful outcomes.

The What's changed tool sits on The National Youth Agency website (see below) and it can be downloaded or completed on-line and printed off. The campaign strongly advises following the principles of this tool to ensure that the event has clear objectives and outcomes and it not a token gesture to democracy - and to the young people themselves.

For further details:

Tel: 0116 242 7350

Email: nya@nya.org.uk

Web: www.nya.org.uk/whatschanged

Useful contacts

This section provides you some web links to organisations that support the Local Democracy Campaign and who can provide guidance and information on citizenship and young people issues.

The **Association of Citizenship Teachers** is the professional subject association for those involved in citizenship education
www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk

The **Big Vote** website is the home of I'm a councillor, get me out of here!, one of the campaign's key activities, and is managed by Gallomanor Communications.
www.bigvote.org.uk/

The **British Youth Council** is the national youth council for young people in the UK - aged under 26 - involved as individuals and through youth organisations.
www.byc.org.uk/

Democracy Coalition for Children and Young People is an alliance of non-governmental, voluntary and statutory organisations working together to increase children and young people's participation in democracy.
www.democracycoalition.org.uk/

The **Electoral Commission** has published the Democracy Cookbook, a comprehensive resource pack containing independent information about how politics works.
www.dopolitics.co.uk

The **Hansard Society** is an independent, non-partisan educational charity, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy.
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/

The **Local Government Association** exists to promote better local government. It is the organising body of the Local Democracy Campaign.
www.lga.gov.uk

Solent People's Theatre is the creator of Political Speed Dating, and a touring company with many more democracy-inspired productions.
www.solentpeoplestheatre.com/

The Edge is the NYA's quarterly newspaper on youth affairs for councils and councillors.
www.nya.org.uk/Templates/internal.asp?NodeID=92539

The **National Youth Agency** promotes young people's personal and social development, and their voice, influence and place in society.
www.nya.org.uk

Young People Now is the magazine for those that work with young people.
www.ypnmagazine.com

www.localdemocracy.org.uk

Please visit the site to find out more about the campaign, discover how you can get involved, download a range of resources and show your support for the campaign.

You can also contact LGconnect for further information on
T. 020 7664 3131
E. localdemocracy@lga.gov.uk